

Georgian College

Georgian College, TouchNet Break New Ground in Canada

*CMS Consolidates Commerce,
Establishes First Online Debit*

- Main Campus: Barrie, Ontario
- Public university
- Founded: 1967
- Enrollment: 9,700 full-time, 28,000 part-time
- Enrollment growth: 35 percent since 2002
- Featured TouchNet technology: U.Commerce[®] (Payment Gateway, Cashiering, Marketplace, Bill+Payment)
- First college in Canada to accept debit card fee payment

On the campus commerce landscape, effecting real change and achieving real progress require a committed partnership, one in which both parties are willing to go “all in.” From the time Georgian College first engaged TouchNet, the two partners have made increasing investments in each other, with the promise of substantial returns.

For Georgian College, the end goal was fulfilling a vision of one system to handle all payments; one that enhanced self-service capabilities for students, slashed the costs of doing business and simplified PCI compliance. For TouchNet, the college proved to be the ultimate laboratory for developing a complete payment solution customized for Canadian commerce. Here’s how they did it.

Campus Profile

Georgian College was established in 1967 as a modest storefront operation in Barrie, Ontario. Today, it’s one of the leading colleges in Canada.



With seven campuses, nearly 10,000 full-time and 28,000 part-time students, Georgian is also one of the largest cooperative education colleges in the country. Enrollment growth continues to outpace the national average, especially at the Barrie campus.

Georgian’s personality and progressiveness have redefined post-secondary education in Ontario, building an impressive legacy of teaching and learning excellence, innovation, and strategic partnerships.

Fewer and Better

When Georgian’s Grant Strasser assumed the role of business systems manager, the college was in the process of reducing the number of network operating systems across all its campuses, from 13 down to two. In line with that initiative, Strasser wanted fewer but better partners in the campus commerce arena.

“The savings in staff time has been incredible,” Strasser said. “We saw what streamlining our

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network could do and decided to apply the same ‘fewer and better’ mantra to the eCommerce side.”

Carrying the Banner

Georgian, part of the Ontario Banner® Users Group, began running Payment Gateway, the first piece of the TouchNet Commerce Management System, in 2004. Reliable, real-time ERP integration was achieved, and it enabled full-time students to pay tuition online, via credit card, for the first time. Within one semester, self-service became the preferred payment method, delivering immediate relief to business office personnel, both at the cashier’s window and on the phone lines. A few semesters later, nearly 30,000 part-time students enjoyed the same capability, and the staff benefits and savings increased “exponentially,” Strasser said.

“With Payment Gateway behind the scenes, payments just happened,” he added. “We just forgot about it. It was that reliable.”

Giving Credit to Debit

Concurrent with a recent Banner upgrade, Strasser began looking for a cashiering system with the same reliability and integration Georgian had enjoyed with TouchNet. At the same time, the school sought a way to build in debit card functionality, given the reduced processing fees and students’ general preference for debit over credit.

Nonetheless, no such solution existed yet in Canadian Higher Education. That’s when Georgian College and TouchNet realized the opportunity to break new ground by building successful integration with Interac, Canada’s

most common processor. Thus, Georgian became the first college in the country to offer debit card payment capability both online and in person.

The success with the self-service debit project proved to be a catalyst for a deeper relationship, as Georgian soon committed to not only the TouchNet Cashiering solution but the entire TouchNet Commerce Management System (CMS).

The move centralized Georgian’s fragmented commerce operations into a single, streamlined and secure platform. For TouchNet, it was a chance to enhance CMS for Canada’s unique regulations, payment processors, taxation and tuition funding protocols.

“I was amazed at how much development work TouchNet put into meeting the regulatory requirements for Canada, as well as delivering the functionality we wanted,” Strasser said. “Both parties were looking for ways to succeed, and communicating regularly to get it done.”

Progress Meets PCI

The challenge of PCI compliance was another motivating factor in Georgian’s decision to go all in with TouchNet, to have one partner handling all payments. Though centralized commerce went hand in hand with PCI best practices, Strasser still expected the process to take two to three years. Instead, it took only slightly more than one year.

“We’ve known for years that after July 1, 2010, we wouldn’t be able to

process debit or credit cards unless we could prove compliance,” Strasser said. “Every college and university in Canada has known that, but with TouchNet so key to our PCI initiative, Georgian was way ahead of the game.”

In fact, in 2008, when the institution went to RFP for parking, bookstore, athletics and housing/hospitality payment vendors, responding parties were required to have TouchNet and Banner partnerships, and winning bidders joined the TouchNet Ready Partner™ program.

Betting to Win

In Georgian College’s quest for fewer but better partners, Strasser said they’ve found one in TouchNet. Students enjoy convenience and capabilities they never had before. The college saves time, money and staff. Payments just happen, regardless of term or time of year. And Georgian has the commerce infrastructure to meet additional, expected enrollment growth and PCI compliance mandates with ease.

“In many ways, we made a bet on the other’s success. It’s been a big win for us and for them,” Strasser said. “We now have a full commerce solution with a single vendor, and TouchNet was able to build a model solution for Canadian Higher Education.” ●

